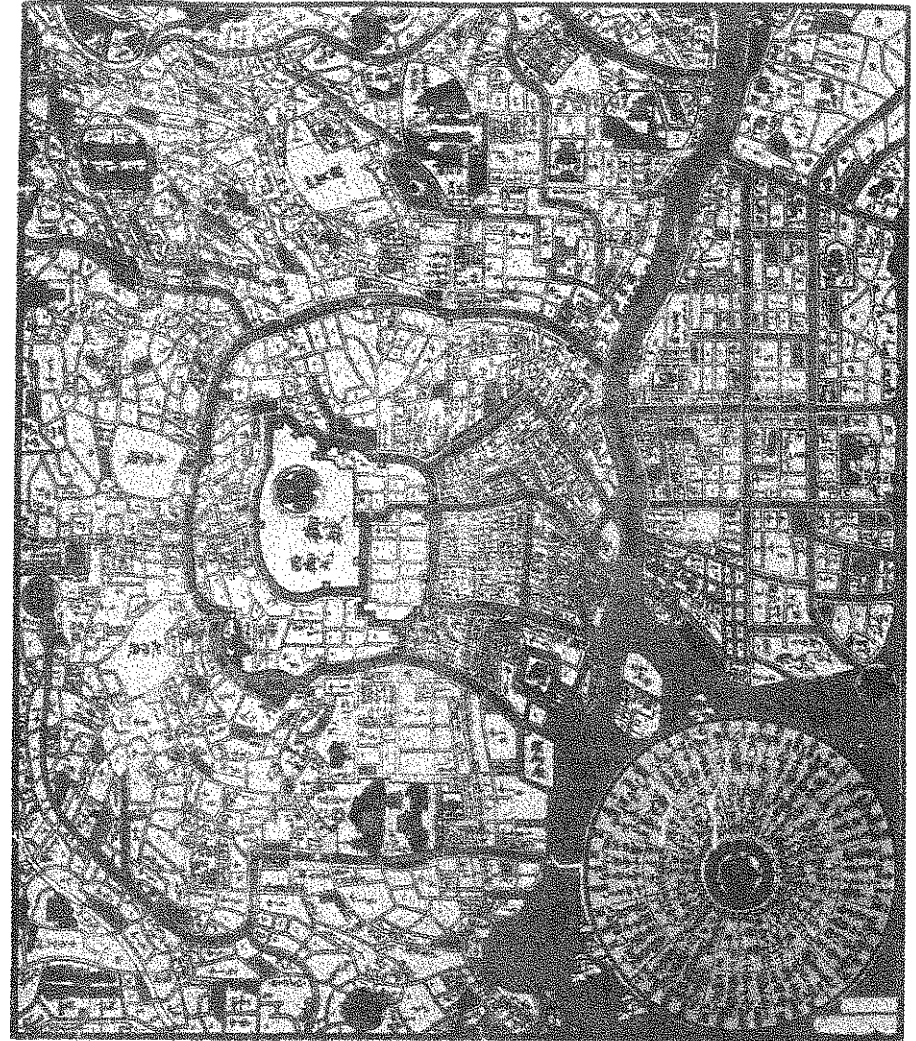


Center-City, Empty Center

Quadrangular, reticulated cities (Los Angeles, for instance) are said to produce a profound uneasiness: they offend our synesthetic sentiment of the City, which requires that any urban space have a center to go to, to return from, a complete site to dream of and in relation to which to advance or retreat; in a word, to invent oneself. For many reasons (historical, economic, religious, military), the West has understood this law only too well: all its cities are concentric; but also, in accord with the very movement of Western metaphysics, for which every center is the site of truth, the center of our cities is always *full*: a marked site, it is here that the values of civilization are gathered and condensed: spirituality (churches), power (offices), money (banks), merchandise (department stores), language (agoras: cafés and promenades): to go downtown or to the center-city is to encounter the social "truth," to participate in the proud plenitude of "reality."

The city I am talking about (Tokyo) offers this precious paradox: it does possess a center, but this center is empty. The entire city turns around a site both forbidden and indifferent, a residence concealed beneath foliage, protected by moats, inhabited by an emperor who is never seen, which is to say, literally, by no one knows who. Daily, in their rapid, ener-



The City is an ideogram:
the Text continues

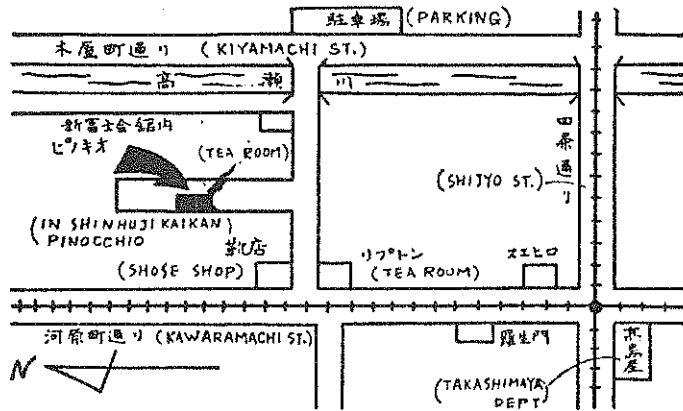
getic, bullet-like trajectories, the taxis avoid this circle, whose low crest, the visible form of invisibility, hides the sacred "nothing." One of the two most powerful cities of modernity is thereby built around an opaque ring of walls, streams, roofs, and trees whose own center is no more than an evaporated notion, subsisting here, not in order to irradiate power, but to give to the entire urban movement the support of its central emptiness, forcing the traffic to make a perpetual detour. In this manner, we are told, the system of the imaginary is spread circularly, by detours and returns the length of an empty subject.

No Address

The streets of this city have no names. There is of course a written address, but it has only a postal value, it refers to a plan (by districts and by blocks, in no way geometric), knowledge of which is accessible to the postman, not to the visitor: the largest city in the world is practically unclassified, the spaces which compose it in detail are unnamed. This domiciliary obliteration seems inconvenient to those (like us) who have been used to asserting that the most practical is always the most rational (a principle by virtue of which the best urban toponymy would be that of numbered streets, as in the United States or in Kyoto, a Chinese city). Tokyo meanwhile reminds us that the rational is merely one system among others. For there to be a mastery of the real (in this case, the reality of addresses), it suffices that there be a system, even if this system is apparently illogical, uselessly complicated, curiously disparate: a good *bricolage* can not only *work* for a very long time, as we know; it can also satisfy millions of inhabitants inured, furthermore, to all the perfections of technological civilization.

Anonymity is compensated for by a certain number of expedients (at least this is how they look to us), whose combination forms a system. One can figure out the address by a (written or printed) schema of orientation, a kind of

decisive element of your orientation: a banal enough proposition with regard to the jungle or the bush, but one much less so with regard to a major modern city, knowledge of which is usually managed by map, guide, telephone book; in a word, by printed culture and not gestural practice. Here, on the contrary, domiciliation is sustained by no abstraction; except for the land survey, it is only a pure contingency: much more factual than legal, it ceases to assert the conjunction of an



identity and a property. This city can be known only by an activity of an ethnographic kind: you must orient yourself in it not by book, by address, but by walking, by sight, by habit, by experience; here every discovery is intense and fragile, it can be repeated or recovered only by memory of the trace it has left in you: to visit a place for the first time is thereby to begin to write it: the address not being written, it must establish its own writing.

Le rendez-vous

*peut-être
tabun*

*fatigue
tsukareta*

*impossible
deki nai*

*je veux dormir
netai*

The rendezvous

maybe
tabun

tired
tsukareta

impossible
deki nai

I want to sleep
netai